

## 321 - How to Neutralize the Sunday Scaries

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't! Today is episode 321 - How to Neutralize the Sunday Scaries.

What are the Sunday Scaries? After a little research, I discovered that the term first appeared in Urban Dictionary of all places but really entered the zeitgeist in the mid 20-teens, and it is a phrase that describes the anticipatory stress of the upcoming week. I would assume that that stress has existed at some point in your life.

It's very likely all have felt this to varying degrees in varying seasons of our lives. One Sunday can feel fine, and the next we feel like everything might catch on fire. And because there are so many contributing factors to that anticipatory stress, the more factors you have, the higher your stress probably is on that particular day.

What are some of those contributing factors? Your upcoming work week and whatever responsibilities you have in your job, where you are in your menstrual cycle, if you drank too much over the weekend and have a hangover, if you have not refilled your energy by either being alone or being with people depending on what you need, if you have too many unknowns staring you down in the upcoming week, trying to figure out what's for dinner, an unusual schedule or even a groundhog day schedule that is making you crazy because you feel like a robot, the weather, if there are birthdays or anniversaries or special occasions that require more effort than you remembered to spend, how much sleep you got this weekend, if you and your partner or you and your kid or you and your boss or you and your friend got into some kind of argument and that relationship feels tenuous going into a new week. There are a lot of things that could contribute to a rising level of the Sunday Scaries.

Now, when this feeling happens, when we feel overwhelmed by something big, like an upcoming week and all it entails, our stress levels rise. We know this. But what does that mean? What happens in our bodies when our stress level is higher? Cortisol, a hormone that is important in the body, goes up, and when cortisol goes up, it starts to do not so great things. Your heart might start beating faster, you feel like a deer in headlights, you're reevaluating every decision you've ever made and wondering what new planner, system, appliance, chore chart, etc. will change everything and make it better. High cortisol causes headaches and irritability. It makes you hyperfocused on neutralizing the source of the stress, but because you're not thinking rationally, you start googling "how to handle the Sunday scaries" which does nothing but make you feel like you need to do more. It's a whole situation.

So here's what I'd like to offer. I want to give you a helpful plan for neutralizing the Sunday Scaries. First, you need to calm your body down. You can't adequately neutralize the stress while you're stressed. So the first part is a three-step calming practice, and then I'll give you seven things you *could* do to make your Sundays less scary.

Let's start with the three step calming practice. You can do this when you're deep in the Sunday Scaries or to help prevent them. It's preemptive and also reactive. It works for both.

Step one: Breathe. Take a few deep breaths, always in through your nose. No mouth breathing. This is to lower the cortisol. This is to let your body know that you are okay. It clears your head, lowers your heart rate, oxygenates your body, slows you down... breathing is literally magical. So whether you're deep in the stress or hoping it doesn't show up, breathing is the place to start.

Step two: Remember that not everything has to happen today. Not everything has to happen today.

Not everything has to be planned on Sunday. Not every day of the upcoming week has to be ready to go. You think that will ease your stress, but it won't. The Sunday Scaries are anticipatory; you're stressed about what hasn't happened yet. In other words, sometimes it doesn't matter what you *do* about your upcoming week. You're going to experience stress no matter what. So because of that, don't put too much stock in Sunday being this magical problem-solving day. Don't feel like you have to have everything ready to go. Don't spend so much of your precious Sunday energy worrying about and plotting against what hasn't happened yet. Instead, tell yourself a different story, that not everything has to happen today. Not every day of the week has to be planned today. You can breathe and trust your future self. The stress is in your head.

That doesn't mean it's not real. But because it's in your head, you can make different rules. You can remind yourself that it's okay if not everything gets done or planned or assessed or fixed. You can do what makes sense for today or even tomorrow if you have the capacity for that. You can even do stuff for the entire week. I'm not telling you to *not* plan the entire week. I'm just saying that's not the key. The doing isn't the key. How you think about your scary Sunday is. And when you think about it in its proper context, the choices you make, the practical decisions you make to support the upcoming week, will go better for you because you're making those decisions independent of your stress.

So that's step two. Remember that not everything has to happen today. Hold it loosely. Plans are not pass/fail. They're just intentions, and you don't have to carry those intentions beyond right now if you don't have the energy, time, support, or emotional stamina for that.

The third step is to ask The Magic Question. What can you do now to make tomorrow easier later? And I'm going to give you seven ways to answer that question.

### **We'll be right back...**

So the three-step calming practice is to breathe, to remember that not everything has to happen today, and then to ask yourself the Magic Question: what can I do now to make tomorrow easier later? And if you have a decent amount of energy, you could extend that to the whole week.

What can I do now to make the week easier later? Or you can name a specific thing that's happening in your upcoming week that is making you feel more stress than the other things. Put that into the Magic Question: what can I do now to make finishing that work project easier later? What can I do now to make hosting that family dinner easier later? What can I do now to make that difficult conversation I'm dreading easier later? The Magic Question is your jumping-off point for a practical choice.

Now listen, as I share these seven possible answers, I'm not saying to do all seven. Some weeks, one will be fantastic. Another week, you might have the motivation and interest and four or five. Each week will likely require something different. How do I know this? Well, based on my podcast data, you are likely a lady, and ladies usually have periods. And periods usually change our hormones every single week. Because of that, you're going to need different things on different Sundays. It's just the way of things. So be kind as you make your choice. Don't talk down to yourself because last week you did five things and today you can barely muster the energy for one. Sometimes the kindest thing is to not choose anything, and it's definitely to not choose everything. Everything is the problem. You don't need more of everything. Just start small.

So here are seven possible choices for how to settle your Sunday Scaries, only after you have done the three-step calming practice of breathing, remembering that not everything has to happen now, and asking yourself the Magic Question in the context of today, maybe tomorrow, and only the entire week if you have excess energy to do so.

The first answer to the Magic Question could be a Brain Dump. Spend a couple of minutes writing down everything that's on your mind. What's clogging up your thoughts? What are you worried about? What tasks are you trying to remember to do? Just get it all out of your head and onto a piece of paper. I think a Brain Dump does wonders for what's swirling around in our heads, at least it does for me.

The reason it helps us later is because in your head, everything has the same urgency. And that contributes to ongoing stress. As long as your head is full, your stress will hang around. So instead, I like to get everything out of my head, and once I do that, I see it all in relationship to each other. I see all of those stressors for what they really are. And then once they're on paper, I can triage. I can send each item along on its best path. One of my favorite ways to do this is to label things on my Brain Dump list as now, soon, later, and never mind. Because equal urgency is often the problem, assigning the proper urgency to those things helps you know what to actually focus on. Don't focus on everything. Focus on what matters now. So the first option could be a Brain Dump.

A second way you can make tomorrow easier later is to move your body now. Moving your body is one of the best ways, outside of breathing, to lower your stress hormones. This is why I like to go for a walk on Sundays. It's a good choice for my mental health. You can take a walk, you can poorly shoot baskets with your kid like I sometimes do, you can have a solo or group dance party, you can garden, you can do whatever. But if you do a Brain Dump, for example, and

you're not feeling a significant decrease in your stress, I think some movement is in order. It's not movement to change your body shape. It's movement to support your mind.

A third way to make tomorrow or the week easier is to tidy your space. It could be that some of your stress is your environment. So consider what would happen if you tidied a little. Not your whole home. Start small wherever you live. Put away the laundry. Maybe wash the dishes. Put the pillows back on the couch. Take things that are everywhere and put them in a basket or a stack or on a tray. Put your purse on a hook or coat rack instead of leaving it on the floor. Relatively simple things. I say relative because some days, a task like washing dishes is not simple at all. It requires so much energy that we don't have. So even for something that feels like it should be small, make it even smaller. So instead of washing the dishes, put the dirty dishes in the sink. That's it. Get them out of your sight so that they don't impact your environment. Be kind if the simplest things just feel like too much.

But if you think your environment is contributing to your stress, don't channel your stress into Big Black Trash Bag Energy where you throw everything out. Simply tidy one small area. Do one small thing. Positively adjust your environment with one small choice, and see what happens. If you do one thing first, give yourself permission to stop. If you feel like you can do another, do another. I like that approach more than deciding to clean one room and then feeling like you quit halfway through. If you just do one task at a time, stop when you're ready to stop. There's zero shame in that.

The fourth thing you could do to answer the Magic Question and neutralize those Sunday Scaries a little is to think about food. I'm not going to say you should meal plan or grocery plan or meal prep or whatever because sometimes those terms come with a picture of what that should be. Let's simplify it. Just think about food. Think about whatever aspect of food you would find helpful.

Think about what you might have for dinner tomorrow. Think about what you might want to have for lunch tomorrow or maybe if you want to make one lunch you can eat off of all week. Think about the best day you can go grocery shopping, or think about when you'd like to schedule a grocery delivery. Think about how stressful managing snacks for your kids was last week and how you might make that a little easier this week. Just think about food. Food and eating are essential for life, and therefore, it's always a problem to solve. So if that is an area that would help neutralize your Sunday Scaries, just think about food.

A fifth idea is to plant your flags. Flags are those things in your schedule that don't move. It's things locked into a time, like appointments, meetings, naptimes or bedtimes if you have little kids on a fairly regular sleeping schedule. We all have different flags, but plant them. Whether you do that on paper on your planner or in your own head, notice where you have flags planted. Nothing else can happen during those times, and you can also organize the rest of your stuff around those times. It's like an anchor for how to think about your week.

Now if you are in a life stage without flags, this can be frustrating. So make some. Make some flags. Plant a flag at a meal. Plant a flag at two in the afternoon, and the purpose of that flag is to check in with yourself and maybe do some of that breathing we talked about earlier. Flags really help us find our way in a day, so if you don't have any obvious ones, make your own flag.

### **We'll be right back...**

The sixth way you can answer the Magic Question is to use another of the 13 Lazy Genius principles: decide once. Decide once about something. A meal plan for the week is a way to decide once. You decided at one point what all of those meals would be. Decided and done. Let's say you have kids at home, and you're struggling to find any kind of summer rhythm with them. You can Decide Once that every Tuesday and Friday is a reading day in your house. That means trips to the library or the bookstore, actually reading in your yard or at a park, having longer solo reading time, reading together as a family, designing pretend book covers, decorating cookies in the shape of books which is literally just a rectangle.

Just notice an area in your life that seems to regularly contribute to your Sunday Scaries and neutralize it by making one decision about one thing and keep doing that thing until it doesn't work for you anymore.

And finally, a seventh idea to help you answer the Magic Question and neutralize those Sunday Scaries is to consider how you'll go to bed tonight. And if you have the capacity, think about how you'll go to bed most Sunday nights.

In fact, this is where I'd like to bring up the Sunday-Only Bedtime Routine.

If the Sunday Scaries are a regular occurrence for you, a wonderful way to neutralize that is to have a specific bedtime routine for yourself that's just for Sundays. Sometimes we feel like a responsible bedtime routine is going to bed early but not before doing some skincare and some stretching and some reading and lighting a candle and whatever else is in your head. And while all of those things are amazing, the type of bedtime routine that we think we should have might not be sustainable every single night. In fact, there are some nights, I want to stay up late. My boys don't go to bed until after 10pm, and it's fun to sometimes stay up past that and hang out with Kaz and watch a movie or a basketball game which puts me going to bed after midnight. There's nothing wrong with that!

But because we are often all or nothing, we think those kinds of nights are irresponsible always and that the responsible grownup thing to do is to have a reasonable bedtime routine we do every night. Well, I don't think that's sustainable or maybe even necessary. Instead, consider if it would be helpful to you to have a Sunday Only Bedtime Routine. A SOBR. Sober? Make it an acronym if you want.

Sunday night might be the night you do go to bed earlier. Maybe you don't have a drink that night since alcohol can mess with your sleep. Maybe it is a night you do the skincare and the stretching and the reading. Maybe it's the one night you don't pick up your phone after 8pm or 9pm.

By creating a bedtime routine for one night, especially a night that has a name with the word Scary in it, it helps prioritize the tending of your stress on that particular night which is great, but it also frees you up to not feel like you have to do that type of routine every night. That's the thing with routines we think we should have. If you don't do them every single day, the days you choose not to feel like a failure. So it's kind of like what I said earlier about tidying. Don't say that you're going to tidy the whole room. Say, "I'm going to put the books away." And then be done with the books. And if you'd like to then say, "I'm going to put the dishes in the dishwasher" and then do that, you can be done then too. You can stack as many tasks as you have the energy for once one is done, but doesn't that feel better than saying "I'm going to clean up the living room and the kitchen" and then you make it a quarter of the way through that imagined task and then quit and then feel bad. Ew. The same thing happens with routines. So instead of saying "I should really go to bed earlier and have this kind of bedtime routine" and then feel bad on the days you don't do it, just do on Sundays. Just tend to yourself in that way on your scariest day. Let the other nights do what they want to do. Start small with Sunday, and have a SOBR. Have a Sunday Only Bedtime Routine.

So those are seven ideas of how you can ask The Magic Question, what can I do now to make tomorrow or this next week easier later? These are not the only seven answers obviously, so please ask and answer for yourself. Also please do not do all of these. Pick one that resonates the most this week, and do it for this week. Next week, you might have a different resonance. What you choose this week might not work next week, so be kind, start small, go slow.

And remember all of this begins with breathing and remembering that not everything has to happen today. It's going to be okay. Calm your body, lower your stress, and then ask the Magic Question, and I think you really will neutralize the Sunday Scaries.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Gina Fournier who sent me this on Instagram. "I have been struggling forever with paying bills. I hate it, and I'm not even sure why. In my mind, it feels like it will take forever, but when I'm finished, it literally is like 15 minutes. I googled 'lazy genius pay bills' and your How to Do Things You Don't Want to Do episode popped up. I listened. I even took some notes. Tonight, I found myself with a rare evening where my husband and kid were gone, and I said I may as well just tackle it. So I automated all the bills that were not automated, and I paid them all tonight. I'm also going to add the reminder to my calendar as you suggested, and I think it won't be so hard now. I wanted to say thank you thank you thank you. Now I'm off to listen to the How to Deal with Paper episode because that's a huge sticking point for me. Thank you for the greatness you put into the world." Gina! This message made me smile so big. Y'all, the struggle to just get the thing done is so real, and we all have different tolerances for it at different times. What I love about Gina's message is that she waited until she had the time and the motivation. It's okay to not force

yourself to do something when you're just not in a place to. It's a real thing to have overwhelm that makes things worse. So Gina did what she could in the time she had, and she set herself up with one little automated calendar reminder so that she's less overwhelmed the next time around. And notice that Gina didn't listen to the how to do things episode and the paper episode all at once. She paid attention to one small annoying part of her life, tended to that, and now that it's in a bit of a flow, she's going to move on to another area. This is just such a great message, Gina, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, y'all, that's it for today! Thanks so much for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!